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ABSTRACT

The Hawaii Project on Children and Youth At-Risk represents a long-term effort to strengthen the individual school's capacity to meet the special needs of students at-risk. According to the project's definition, a student is at-risk if he/she has consistently failed to make satisfactory school progress, if that failure could be positively correlated with risk indicators, and if the probability of failure could be reduced through the delivery of educational services. Academic, psychological, and social-behavioral indicators of at-risk students, and 15 at-risk populations, were identified by the study. Existing statewide programs for at-risk students which tended to remove students from the mainstream curriculum were reviewed and the project decided that at-risk students would be best served in the regular classroom. The at-risk study then identified 10 major points of contrast between successful and at-risk students and formulated 16 recommendations for augmenting the regular education program to serve the at-risk student. An at-risk project is currently being considered to develop mechanisms for assisting schools in implementing elements of effective schooling for successful and at-risk students. The major features of this long-term educational improvement plan include: (1) support for the school as the unit of change; (2) use of community education as a process for networking; (3) application of a cooperative action research strategy; and (4) integration of elements from established and experimental programs. (NB)

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THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT-RISK EFFORT IN HAWAII

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Prepared for the 1987 Northwest
Regional Educational Laboratory Conference

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Thank you for attending today's session spotlighting Hawaii's at-risk story.

Background

Hawaii's at-risk story unfolded relatively recently, in February, 1986, when a policy issue study on children and youth at-risk was assigned to the Office of Instructional Services. Much of my presentation will focus on the design and implementation of the study and its major outcomes.

The at-risk study was needed because the at-risk is a growing problem in Hawaii. Perhaps as many as 25% of our students in grades K-12 are at-risk. It is a problem affecting all schools, both urban and rural areas, and all income levels. More than 1,000 teen-agers become pregnant in Hawaii annually. There are about 4,000 school-age runaways annually. Each year about 300 children of all ages require out-of-home placement due to sexual or other forms of abuse. In 1985, there was a 138% increase in arrests for drug abuse among juveniles ages 13-17 years since 1978.

In Hawaii, juveniles commit a disproportionate share of some local crimes: more than half of burglary arrests, over 2/5 of larceny-theft arrests, over 2/5 of auto-theft arrests, over 2/5 of robbery arrests, almost 1/5 of drug abuse arrests, and almost 1/5 of liquor laws arrests.

The at-risk problem is not unique to Hawaii, but some of the changes in Hawaii's economy since statehood in 1959 give the at-risk problem a local coloration. For example, because of the high costs of living and a shifting toward a low-wage service base, Hawaii has one of the highest rates of multi-wage earner families, 62 percent compared to 54 percent nationally. This is due to the high proportion of women in the labor force, about 59%. Hawaii ranks 4th nationwide in terms of the proportion of women working.

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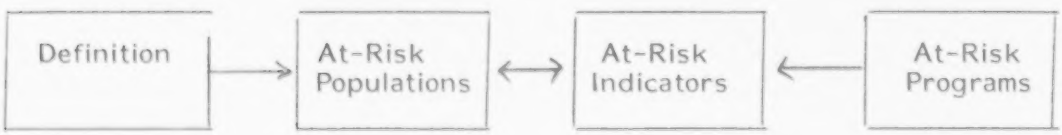
There are other demographic data which suggests that the at-risk problem may be manifesting itself in some ways which are unique to Hawaii, requiring farsighted, informed and prudent policy development from our institutions of state government.

Initial Study Design

To carry out the study, an ad hoc committee was organized consisting of staff from the Department of Education and the College of Education. The following schema represents the initial work design which was implemented:

Initial Work Design of the At-Risk Committee



The plan was to define "at risk", to identify at-risk populations based on this definition, to identify at-risk indicators [how do we know a population is at-risk?] and to review existing programs to meet the special needs of at-risk populations.

The study defined a child or youth at-risk if the following three conditions prevailed:

- o the student is consistently failing to make satisfactory progress through school;
- o this failure can be positively correlated with identifiable factors called risk indicators;
- o the probability of failure can be reduced through the delivery of educational services.

In defining "at-risk," the committee kept the following considerations in mind:

1. The definition should not be confused with the existing populations or groups of students who are at-risk--since the point of the definition was to provide criteria to determine who is at-risk and who is not.

2. The definition should not be confused with the indicators of at-risk--those concomitants that go with the target groups and enable one to predict who will be at-risk.

Indicators can be grouped into three broad categories: academic, psychological, and social/behavioral.

Academic indicators directly impact on the student's performance in school. These include:

- o poor school attendance
- o expulsion or suspension
- o apathy toward or fear of conventional instruction
- o inattentiveness or lack of concentration
- o low standardized test scores
- o non-certifiable learning problems.

The psychological indicators reflect a range of personality problems or disorders. These are:

- o long-term depression
- o high anxiety
- o eating disorders
- o alienation from the mainstream
- o exhaustion
- o poor self-concept

The social behavioral indicators concern the student's relationship with other students, teachers or outside agencies. These include:

- o low motivation
- o aggression
- o social withdrawal
- o substance abuse
- o early or promiscuous sex
- o hijacking, fighting or vandalism
- o deviant behavior
- o police record

3. The definition should not be weighted in terms of any programs for dealing with at-risk students--since it was intended as a guide to the evaluation and strengthening of existing programs and the possible development of new approaches or the reintegration of present programs.

4. The definition should be workable--that is, an operational definition was to be preferred over a purely theoretical one.

At-Risk populations identified in the study include the following:

- o those with limited English proficiency
- o underachievers
- o the intellectually limited
- o the economically disadvantaged
- o the malnourished
- o substance abusers
- o dropouts and potential dropouts
- o those retained for 1 or more years
- o pregnant teens or teens with children
- o those from unstable homes
- o the abused and neglected
- o the psychologically impaired
- o those who threaten or attempt suicide
- o juvenile delinquents
- o the "silent ones"*

Having defined at-risk and having identified at-risk populations and indicators, the study committee's attention was then focused on reviewing existing statewide programs for at-risk populations. The following programs were reviewed.

- o Chapter I
- o Comprehensive School Alienation Program (CSAP)

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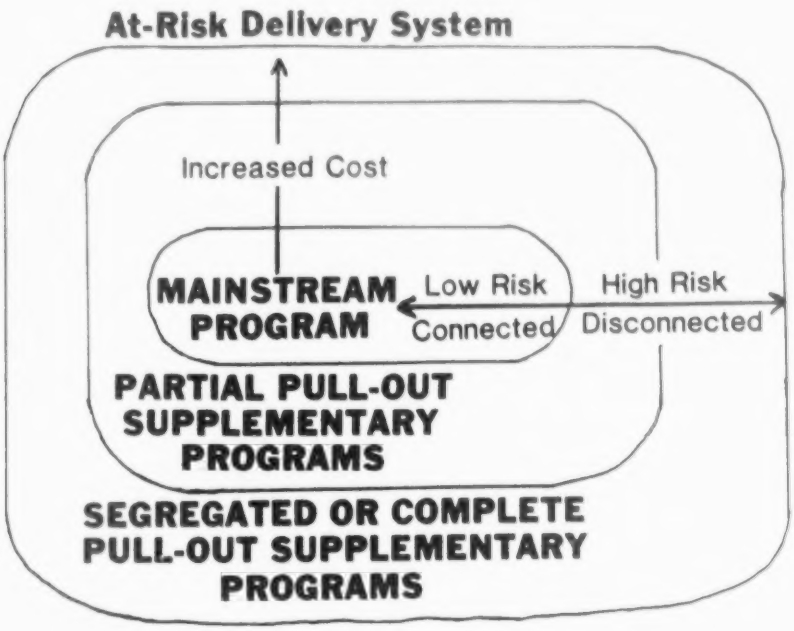
* For lack of a more suitable name for this group of students, this term is being used to refer to those students who are experiencing stressful personal and family situations which interfere with their learning in school. Children whose families are in transition due to divorce, separation, death or re-marriage are a growing population within this "silent majority." Also growing in numbers are the bored and indifferent, and those capable youngsters who make little or no effort to learn because, as expressed by Dr. William Glasser, their basic needs for belonging, power, freedom and fun are not being met through conventional classroom instruction or otherwise. (Control Theory in the Classroom, Perennial Library, 1986)

- o Pre-Industrial Preparation Program (PIP)
- o Students of Limited English Proficiency (SLEP)
- o Intensive Basic Skills (IBS)
- o Early Provisions for School Success (EPSS)
- o School for Unwed Mothers (Booth Home)

In reviewing these at-risk programs, which tended to remove students from the mainstream curriculum for varying periods of time, the study committee was convinced that the key to the at-risk student is to be found in regular education, for it serves as the core of a student's educational experience and the single area where the most effective preventative measures can be mounted. Indeed, as the following diagram indicates, the further removed students become from the core area, the more at-risk they are of becoming disconnected from the mainstream setting in the school and from the role models with which they need to be in contact. Also, the further they are from this core, the more expensive remedial treatment becomes.



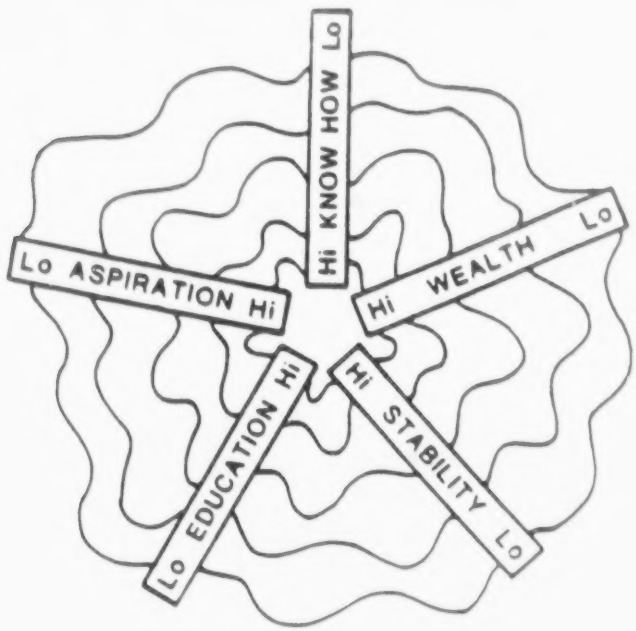
At about this time, in matching at-risk populations and indicators with the program delivery system, it became clear to committee members that we had progressed as far as our limited resources could take us. We simply lacked the research capabilities and resources needed to be more definitive relative to the relationships among populations, indicators and programs. Ours was but an armchair analysis relying heavily on the accumulated experiences and perceptions of committee members, and we had gone as far as we could go. We had come to a standstill. Therefore, we created our second work paradigm.

Work Paradigm #2

At-Risk Populations
Major Characteristics of At-Risk Students
Effective Schooling for Students (Successful and At-Risk)

The idea was to put all of our identified at-risk populations in a pot, so to speak, and to stir the pot to see what major patterns or configurations emerged. Then the intent was to use these characteristics as a basis for identifying the elements of effective schooling for the at-risk. We felt that this approach would constitute a more holistic and preventative approach to the at-risk study, where previously our approach had been rather atomistic. For much of this phase of the study, the committee was indebted to the work of Dr. Arthur King, Jr., Director, Curriculum Research and Development Group, who served as principal investigator.

In clarifying the differences between at-risk and successful students, the following figure proved to be useful.



According to this figure, the series of concentric circles represent the socio-economic structure of our society. The inner rings represent those who have wealth, power, and the capacity to control and influence events. They

have the resources and know-how to care for themselves and to secure the benefits of society for themselves and their children.

The individuals and families in the outer rings, by contrast, lack access to these resources. They have a poor handhold on wealth and other resources. They do not understand the political, economic, and social systems and have little control over events that affect them. Children and youth in these families rarely receive the support, encouragement, resources, stability, and other features of families that lead to success in school. Their vulnerability to the ills of society is great - poverty, drugs, delinquency, and school failure are high. Schools are not well-equipped to support these children in their educational endeavors. They have the most success with students from the inner rings.

The figure of the inner and outer rings suggests that the closer one is to the inner rings greater are the chances for success. Conversely, the further removed one becomes from the inner rings greater are the chances for failure.

The at-risk study has identified some major points of contrast between successful and at-risk students. While there are always exceptions to the rule, in general it is believed that the following contrasts between successful and at-risk students are pertinent:

1. Students with positive familial and social experiences are grounded in standard American values, goals, attitudes, and behaviors. At-Risk students often do not have these formative conditions essential towards the development of a solid educational foundation. For this reason their affiliation with the mainstream is seriously undercut.

2. Successful students learn school and life-success models from their parents, from their school programs and school associates, from their peers, from their churches, from their neighborhoods, and from their total life experiences. These provide a support system for the students. At-risk students often lack this support system at almost every level of their experiences. In secondary schools they are usually grouped with other at-risk students in tracked or special programs, reflecting and amplifying neighborhood segregation.

3. Successful people grow up in an environment which promotes self-esteem, hope, and faith in the future. Their families have been successful in economic, social, and other terms. The at-risk student often lacks this background and orientation in life, as well as in school.

4. Successful students have positive exemplars and family expectancies which help them to resist group pressure to engage in drug use, illegal activities, and other deviant activities found in the age group. The at-risk students are more vulnerable to these pressures.

5. Successful students have well-developed perceptual and language skills, insights, and habits which serve them well in school and life tasks. They have stimulation to engage in rich, interactive conversations, to read widely, and to develop and use sophisticated language patterns. At-risk students are often severely limited in these experiences and often do not develop in their capacities in these areas.

6. A stable, healthy, and supportive family is the hallmark of a successful student. Where there is poverty, poor mental health, a lack of stability in their lives, students have limited access to exemplary role models. They lack the self-confidence, hope, and faith in opportunities for progress and full participation in life which is necessary to sustain them in their educational efforts.

7. Successful students have homes which value academic success--even insist upon it. They have support, space and time for study, and a range of study and reference materials. Parents have insights into the student's school situation and potential and provide for enrichment experiences. At-risk students come from families without these insights or resources.

8. Successful students perceive their school as friendly and supportive; they have faith in their own abilities as well as the help available in the school. At-risk children do not see the

school as a friendly and supportive place. They receive a muchlarger share of negative messages about themselves and what they have done than successful students. They are not at all confident that they have access to the benefits of "the good life" in school.

9. Successful students typically come from families that take good care of their health and observe proper nutrition. Where mental health problems appear, the prospects for remedial attention are present. The at-risk populations are far less likely to have the habit of caring for themselves - and are less likely to have, or even to use, the services that go with good health. Services are often crises-oriented.

10. Handicapping conditions can appear in any family or socio-economic group. However, some families are able to provide a much firmer support system to compensate for the handicap or limitation. These families are more aware of available services and are more aggressive in seeing that their children are served. The at-risk population, however, does not seek these services and often let the handicapping conditions dictate their life style.

So what should schooling be like for students, both successful and at-risk? In keeping with the recommendation to keep students in the mainstream curriculum to the extent possible, the committee recommended that the regular education program be augmented. Such a program:

a. should reflect a positive, supportive climate in its approach to students (a) by knowing and valuing the students and making them feel that they are known and valued; (b) by maximizing positive feedback (grades, marks, personal statements) and (c) by minimizing negative feedback. To do this the school should be small enough that the student is known. A "school-within-a-school" arrangement should be designed, which can create a "school community" so necessary for these students and desirable for all students.

b. should have a broad academic focus in the curriculum, including cultural enlightenment, technologies, sports, and guidance. The program should have the capacity to open up the most doors for the student to post high school programs and to life experiences in general. It should be based on effective teaching and learning concepts and techniques.

c. should provide extra assistance to keep all students in the mainstream, in the form of summer programs; extra hours of classes as needed; tutoring; facilities for after-school study; or child care for high school students with children.

d. should result in graduation from high school -- with credentials and capacities to go beyond to higher education, vocational training, the world of work, or other viable options.

e. should be rich in student activities--sports, clubs, music, dance, community service, and cultural events.

f. should have qualified staff--in teaching, in administration, in program leadership, in curriculum, in counseling and guidance, and in support and auxiliary staff.

g. should have strong guidance and counseling programs, with a well-resourced and qualified staff. These components should meet the developmental and special needs of the students and families.

h. should have an "auxiliary staff" of support people from community agencies who work in close collaboration with the school (social work, mental health, police, probation, welfare, etc). The school staff should coordinate this effort and should serve both the students and their families.

i. should arrange with appropriate agencies to ensure that the physical needs of students, where these are lacking, are met. These include food, clothing and shelter.

j. should provide for psychological and social support when needed.

k. should minimize segregation of students from those with different socio-economic, gender, ethnic, and school success records.

l. should make available comprehensive and timely information on student progress and behavior to school leaders, counselors, teachers, students, and parents.

m. should have full and regular links, on a daily basis if necessary, with the home--providing information on attendance, homework completion, grades, and school behavior. Teachers and other staff and parents must be communicating the same things to students and reinforcing each other. Parent education and support is necessary.

n. should be generously funded. Schools serving at-risk students in regular education programs never have enough money to give the richness of program necessary to be successful. More generously funded programs in special education and others should be examined to gain this perspective.

o. should emphasize the anticipation, early detection, and prevention of academic difficulties, not their remediation. Such devices as extra teaching and tutoring, summer schools, suitable teaching techniques, and the like, are necessary.

p. should include a research and development (R & D) support component to help locate, modify, and develop the educational materials, designs, and strategies necessary to build the program.

It is believed that these elements constitute a conceptual framework for assisting schools in strengthening their response to the special needs of at-risk students. From another perspective, they provide insights into how regular education can contribute to a preventive approach to the at-risk.

Hawaii Project on Children and Youth At-Risk

A major outcome of the at-risk study are the elements of effective schooling for successful and at-risk students. At the present time, an

at-risk project is being considered to develop mechanisms for assisting schools to implement these elements.

The Hawaii Project on Children and Youth At-Risk represents a long-term effort to strengthen the individual school's capacity to meet the special needs of students at-risk. This effort will entail sustained, intensive and coordinated research and development (R&D) efforts to support the two major thrusts of the project: (1) reviewing and augmenting the mainstream program in order to strengthen the preventive aspects of regular education, and (2) reviewing and coordinating the school's special programs, services and practices so as to improve the delivery of services to students who are already at-risk.

The major features of this long-term educational improvement venture include the following:

1. SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOL AS THE UNIT OF CHANGE. This support will consist of the knowledge and skills of educators working at all levels of the educational system---the school, district and state levels of the Department of Education; the University of Hawaii; The Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate; and other public, private and community organizations.

2. USE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION AS A PROCESS FOR NETWORKING. Strategies and structures will be developed to strengthen the coordination of resources (funds, personnel, materials and time) to assist project schools in responding more effectively to the at-risk problem.

3. APPLICATION OF A COOPERATIVE ACTION RESEARCH STRATEGY. This may include development of program ideas and processes; the identification of needed networks; provisions for staff development and the involvement of the school faculty and administrators in the developmental aspects of the project; and even bolder, more unusual and sometimes more expensive alternatives to standard practice in the direction of school reform.

4. INTEGRATION OF ELEMENTS FROM ESTABLISHED AND EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS. This will create a critical mass of mutually supportive program features substantial enough to reduce the at-risk problem, using the following principles and practices:

    1. emphasize mainstreaming approaches and deemphasize segregation;
    2. provide all students with a common core curriculum;
    3. build better links between schools and families;
    4. create a school climate fostering personal relationships and respect among students, teachers, administrators, and parents;
    5. emphasize prevention over remediation by developing procedures for the early detection of distress;
    6. establish an orderly and current information system on students' progress, as well as their educational needs;
    7. provide educational continuity for students who change schools frequently;
    8. provide ready access to community agencies dealing with child abuse, student misconduct, pregnancy, nutrition, mental health and other at-risk conditions;
    9. implement community education.

The project will be conducted under the auspices of the newly established Hawaii School/University Partnership, a joint venture by the University of Hawaii, The Kamehameha Schools, and the Department of Education, and will be administered through the office of the Windward District Superintendent. The project organization will consist of a Leadership Team; a Research, Planning and Evaluation Group; and a School Service Group. Many activities implemented will be in-kind contributions of resources from the three cooperating organizations in the Partnership, as well as other organizations to be identified.

Many people must play a part in reducing and ultimately eliminating the conditions which place young people at risk in our society. They include public health officials, social workers, early childcare staff, elected and appointed governmental officials at all levels, business leaders, and, most

importantly, parents. However, at the center of any strategy should be the school. The school is the only institution in our society, outside the family, which regularly and intensively interacts with all children and youth, including the at-risk. There is no other public agency to which all parents must send their children but the school. And parents send all of their children to school---the good, the bad, and the indifferent.

The Hawaii at-risk project, therefore, considers it the natural and necessary job of the school to take leadership in developing more adequate solutions to the problems of the at-risk, to examine community-related problems and resources, to look at the characteristics of schools that do not serve these students and their families well, and to develop educational programs and practices that bring the necessary changes.